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Soviet Union Eastern Europe

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This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the USSR - Eastern Europe Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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~~SECRET SPOKE~~Polish Congress Begins

Edward Gierek kicked off the Polish party's seventh congress Monday with a recitation of Poland's economic and political progress since 1971.

He emphasized that the people are now living better than ever before and that the party will continue to seek further improvements in the living standard. For the Polish consumer, Gierek had the welcome news that price increases on basic food items will be delayed well into next year and that overcoming difficulties in meat supplies is one of the party's most important goals. Gierek said that the price policy for 1976-1980 would ensure increases in real wages.

On internal political matters, Gierek repeated the standard formulations on the need to increase the militancy and effectiveness of ideological activity. He also proposed that the period between party congresses be extended to five years and said that several constitutional amendments were needed to reflect the socialist nature of the state.

Gierek paid the requisite tribute to Moscow, saying that the Soviet Union is the "leading force of the international Communist movement." He called for expansion of cooperation within CEMA, claimed that "good conditions" were shaping up for a European Communist Party Conference, and said the Polish party favors the idea of a new world conference.

Soviet party leader Brezhnev is present along with most East European party leaders; the notable exception is Romania's Ceausescu. Brezhnev will address the congress on Tuesday. (UNCLASSIFIED)

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Dissident Trials as Backdrop
to Sakharov's Nobel Award?

Two leading dissidents close to Nobel Peace Prize winner Andrey Sakharov reportedly may go on trial this week. The timing is probably not accidental. By having the trials overlap the date on which Sakharov was to have received the award in Oslo (December 10), the regime would underscore that publicity surrounding Sakharov's case will not deter it from enforcing domestic controls.

Dissident sources say that the trial of biologist Sergey Kovalev will probably begin December 9 in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he has been detained since his arrest a year ago. Although Kovalev is charged with "anti-Soviet agitation" stemming from his alleged support of underground Lithuanian Catholic activities, his former role in the illegal Moscow chapter of Amnesty International and his relationship with Sakharov probably contribute to his travails.

The connection is even clearer in the case of Andrey Tverdokhlebov, the former secretary of Amnesty International's Moscow branch and a co-founder of Sakharov's "democratic movement." The trial of Tverdokhlebov, who was arrested in April, has reportedly been postponed several times; Sakharov now expects that it will be held this week, or "soon."

Sakharov has repeatedly protested the detention of his two colleagues, and in a gesture of defiance, last month formally invited them among others to the Oslo Nobel award ceremony which he himself has been prevented from attending. By holding the trials of the two this week, the regime would be making its own strong countergesture to Sakharov and his allies at home and abroad.

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Although the regime has not foreclosed its option of expelling Sakharov from the USSR at any time, there is no sign that he will be permitted--or forced--to leave before the award ceremony. His wife, who has been in the West for medical treatment and whom Sakharov delegated to receive his prize, has a Soviet re-entry visa valid until December 20. Both Sakharov and his wife remain anxious, however, that the regime may bar her return home at the last moment. Far from keeping his head down, however, Sakharov again this year led some 70 other dissidents in the annual human rights vigil on December 5 (Constitution Day) in Moscow's Pushkin Square.

Meanwhile, the USSR's other Nobel prize winner, establishment economist Leonid Kantorovich, is already in Stockholm, where on December 10 he will share this year's economics prize with US scientist Koopmans. Kantorovich's work on optimal use of resources has been reformist by Soviet standards, but his public politics are clearly orthodox; in a Stockholm interview last Sunday he referred to the USSR's "perfect, socialist system." (UNCLASSIFIED)

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Hungary-Vatican:
Who Will Succeed Mindszenty?

Premier Lazar's audience with the Pope last month, the first by a Hungarian government head in the Communist era, was an important step toward the establishment of better Hungarian-Vatican relations.

The visit and Lazar's subsequent statement about possible diplomatic relations raise the question of selecting a successor to the late Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty as archbishop of Esztergom and thus primate of Hungary. Both Budapest and the Vatican presumably will want to fill this vacancy before talking seriously of diplomatic relations.

Both sides appear willing to regularize the Hungarian church leadership. They agreed on the selection of five diocesan bishops last January, leaving only two (Gyor and Esztergom) of the eleven dioceses without regular leadership.

The Vatican has been working to improve its relations with Eastern Europe in order to improve the church's working conditions there. It may believe that dealings with Hungary are the easiest way to keep up the momentum. Budapest, which has recently been relatively conciliatory toward local church activity, probably wants to regularize the leadership of the Hungarian church in order both to negate the Mindszenty legacy of fierce anti-Communism and to bolster its own political legitimacy. Settling the issue could also give Budapest some important points on the European security scoreboard. The Soviets probably have an important background role to play, and may see a Vatican-Hungarian accord as a useful contribution to the post-Helsinki atmosphere.

Any successor to Mindszenty will have to be a compromise selection, not only because of political

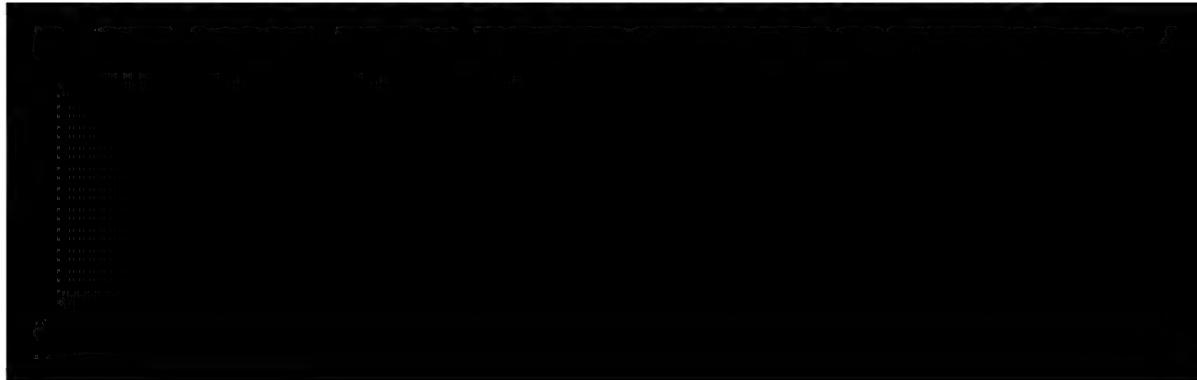
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necessity but also because the Vatican agreed in 1964 to prior consultations. A likely candidate appears to be Laszlo Lekai, 65, the apostolic administrator of Esztergom since 1974. He was Mindszenty's secretary during World War II, was jailed along with Mindszenty by the Horthy regime, and then worked in the lower church ranks until he was appointed apostolic administrator of Veszprem in 1972.

Lekai apparently is not a member of either the regime-sponsored popular front or the peace committees, the *Opus Pacis* and the Catholic Committee of the Peace Council. The Vatican reportedly is willing to nominate him. Budapest's attitude toward him has not been spelled out, but there are some signs that it may be willing to go along with the appointment. The regime permitted Lekai to accompany the acting head of the Hungarian episcopate to a synod in Rome in October 1974, and allowed him this spring to write the notice of Mindszenty's death in *Uj Ember*, the Hungarian Catholic weekly.

Another--but perhaps less likely--candidate is 64-year-old Jozsef Bank, Archbishop of Eger, the third-ranking diocese in the Hungarian episcopate. Bank reportedly was a classmate of Casaroli, the Vatican's "foreign minister," for a time in the 1930s. While Bank's reputation is largely based on his scholarly writings on canon law, he has steadily progressed up the church hierarchy since 1964. Bank belongs to the regime's popular front organization, and there is an unconfirmed report that he may be a member of one of the "peace priest" committees.

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The Vatican may wait before elevating any new archbishop of Esztergom to cardinal status, even though the Hungarian church now has no cardinals while the Polish church has two. The Hungarian regime may insist on a waiting period as a precondition to any appointment and the Vatican may also see merit in waiting until the new man has shown his colors.

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